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SUBJECT: PLATEAU STATE GOVERNOR CLAIMS VINDICATION

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary. Plateau State Governor Dariye, in his first meeting with US officials since 2004, tried to put a positive spin on his last two years in office, dismissing the corruption charges against him as baseless and trumpeting his ability to remain in office despite his expulsion from the ruling party last year and a state of emergency declared in Plateau in 2004. The Governor confirmed rumors in the press that he and almost the entire Plateau State government were planning to abandon the ruling party in favor of the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD) and alluded to a possible senatorial bid to unseat his rival Ibrahim Mantu, the current Deputy Senate President. Dariye mentioned his revoked U.S. visa at the end of the meeting, suggesting without further elaboration that this issue, too, would be rectified one day.
End Summary.

Still Standing

12. (C) Governor Dariye in a 90 minute meeting with Econoff and Washington TDYers focused the discussion on his running political battle with Obasanjo and prominent PDP politicians, portraying himself as a survivor who bested his rivals and managed to stay in office. Dariye dismissed the corruption charges against him as specious and called the six month state of emergency in 2004 hypocritical. He suggested that both the money laundering allegations and the state of emergency were part of a smear campaign orchestrated by his arch rival Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu. The Governor claimed that Mantu considered himself to be a possible successor to Obasanjo and tried to ingratiate himself with the President by embarrassing the Plateau State government. Dariye questioned the money laundering charges, claiming he had made his fortune when he was a certified accountant before entering politics. He rhetorically asked econoff and TDYers "what is money laundering." (Note: Scotland Yard in 2004 arrested Dariye for laundering 1.7 million dollars, but he fled London after being released on bail. End Note.) Dariye made similar attempts to downplay the 2004 state of emergency, wondering out loud why President Obasanjo had declared a state of emergency in his state, but refused to apply the same treatment to other states, particularly Rivers State in the Niger Delta.

13. (C) Making biblical references to bolster his point, Dariye claimed his government had been vindicated in the aftermath of the third term agenda. Despite all the tribulations of the last two years, he was still governor of Plateau state and Mantu had been publicly disgraced for his

leading role in the third term push in the National Assembly.

He told his visitors that he would seek revenge by either running for Senate in 2007 himself or sponsoring another politician to unseat Mantu next year. The Governor concluded by saying he would only reconcile with Mantu after the Deputy Senate President was kicked out of office. (Note: Both Mantu and Dariye are from the Plateau central senatorial district. End Note)

On the 2007 Presidential Elections

¶4. (C) On the presidential elections, Dariye opined that the presidency should return to the north, claiming that south-south politicians were not serious about power and would be easily assuaged with money and offers of a larger percentage of oil revenue. Dariye said Vice President Atiku Abubakar had the best organization and was a "hero" for his outspoken opposition to the third term. The PDP, on the other hand, had splintered into three factions and would lose additional support when the various presidential aspirants in the ruling party realized that they would not receive Obasanjo's blessing.

Fighting for Party Affiliation in Plateau

¶5. (C) Dariye confirmed rumors in the press that factions of the Alliance for Democracy, All Nigerian People's Party, and the ACD would soon band together to form a new opposition alliance. Dariye did not provide a date for the new party, but suggested that the alliance would emerge after the PDP's

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nomination convention this fall.

¶6. (C) The Governor was less open about the recent political violence in his state. While he does appear to have a strong following among Plateau state officials, there have been attempts by other politicians to weaken Dariye's influence and prevent him and his allies in the ACD from capturing state political offices next year. For example, an ACD gubernatorial aspirant on 30 June was kidnapped and murdered.

ACD officials in Plateau have been quick to blame the ruling party and 12 arrested suspects were recently released on bail. In a subsequent private meeting, Dariye's senior special assistant on religious affairs told Poloff that Plateau State was a bellweather for the entire middle belt region and he expected the state to become an important battleground between the ruling party and the opposition. He pointed out that none of the attacks had targeted PDP-affiliated politicians, and that the Federal Police presence had not improved security of opposition members.

Comment

¶6. (C) Dariye was clearly pleased to have his first official USG visitors in two years and spent the majority of his time trying to rehabilitate his battered image. Although he mainly discussed substantive issues, he did mention his revoked U.S. visa at the end of the meeting. The Governor did not ask his visitors to reverse or even review the decision of the consular section, but rather suggested that like his other recent troubles, this too would be rectified one day.

¶7. (C) Dariye's rivalry with Mantu and his flirtation with the opposition have been widely reported in the press, but his comments confirm that the opposition has been aggressively courting PDP governors and politicians who have fallen out of favor with President Obasanjo ahead of the 2007 elections. Dariye, unlike his counterparts in Bayelsa and

Anambra, has managed to control the state party machinery and stay in office. As long as he is able to stave off a corruption indictment and keep political violence to a minimum, it is likely he will be able to deliver Plateau State to the opposition in the election next year. End Comment.
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